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ABSTRACT

Based on a sample of (466) midwestern college women, this study reported on differences in feminine role orientation related to: (1) the student's year in college, (2) whether she was on a branch or the central campus of the university where research was to be conducted, and (3) whether she was working for a baccalaureate or Ph.D. degree. Results of the study indicate that freshmen women have more traditional and less secular "modern" feminine role orientation than upperclass women and Ph.D. students but less than branch campus women. Women were found to be more flexible in attitudes toward the behavior of others than about their own behavior. There was found to be a congruence between attitudes toward another's behavior and one's own. (Author/PG)

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CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE WOMEN VIEW THEIR POSITION[1]

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CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE WOMEN VIEW THEIR ROLES[1]

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The ever and over-studied population, college students, has recently been described in a Fortune magazine article as a generation of extremely tolerant people.

> The new tolerance extends--perhaps too far--to personal morality . . . It is clear that students are motivated partly by a laudable respect for the rights of others. But in some cases, tolerance may reflect uncertainly about moral standards . . ." (Faltermayer, 1973, pp. 146-147)

This same article noted that "Almost none of the women interviewed said that their sole objective in life was to be a housewife and mother. The few who did were defensive about it . . ." (p. 152) This apparent shift in morality, to a "do-your-own-thingism," at first glance seems to be a movement from an other-directed to privatism-oriented morality. At second glance, however, we wonder whether this is really a shift or merely an extension of an other-directed orientation. One assumes a kind of moralistic anarchism because it is "the thing to do." If this is so, then we would expect people to be far more rigid about their own behavior than about the behavior of others.

At the same time that there has been an emphasis upon doing one's own thing, there has been a change from an absolute to a situation ethic. This shift has occurred concurrently with the present women's movement. On an overall basis, then, there has been a convergence of phenomena--a moral revolution and a women's movement. As a result of this covergence, we would expect changes in behavior or expectations of behavior, particularly the behavior of college women. Specifically, we would expect to find changes in how contemporary college women view their roles as women and whether there are differences between what they consider acceptable and appropriate behavior for themselves and what they find acceptable and appropriate behavior in others.

In Komarovsky's "ovinal" article on "Cultural contradictions and sex roles" (1946), she described two roles available for the college women of the mid-nineteen forties--the "feminine" role and the "modern" role. The former was, in essence, a traditional one characterized by unaggressive personality traits and emotional and supportive behavior vis-a-vis men. The "modern" role she saw as "In a sense no sex role at all, because it partly obliterates the differentiation in sex. It demands of the women much of the same virtues, patterns of behavior, and attitude that it does of the man of a corresponding age." (p. 185) She suggested that the existence

of these two roles, each involving virtually diametrically opposing patterns of behavior, posed problems for women trying to adjust to such divergent normative expectations. In accounting for the changes in role characteristics, Komarovsky pointed to: (1) Cultural norms are often functionally unsuited to the social situations to which they apply . . . (2) Changes in the mode of life have created new situations which have not as yet been defined by culture . . . and (3) The existence of incompatible cultural definitions of the same situations, such as the clash of old fashioned and radical mores, of religion and law, of norms of economic and familial institutions. (p. 184)

In 1950, Wallin replicated the Komarovsky study and found that while there were conflicting role definitions, college women did not experience severe role conflict as a reaction to these contradictory definitions. In a subsequent study, Kammeyer (1964) developed scales to measure attitudes toward feminine role behavior and female personality traits in an attempt to deal with some of the "methodological and empirical questions" raised by the Komarovsky study. He expected to find a strong relationship between attitudes toward feminine role behavior and attitudes toward female personality traits In other words, women who had traditional attitudes about feminine role behavior would also have traditional attitudes toward female personality traits and those with modern attitudes toward feminine role

behavior would have modern attitudes toward female personality traits. He was interested in factors affecting attitude consistency and found that for some college women the two sets of attitudes were consistent. This consistency between attitudes toward the feminine role and toward female personality traits was found to be related to patterns of interaction with others: the more friends one had, the greater the consistency. Similarly, frequency of dating and quantity of interaction with parents influenced attitude consistency. Kammeyer's interpretation of the relationship between interaction and attitude consistency focused upon the communications network and feedback systems in which the college woman found herself. Women who interacted a great deal with peers and parents received feedback about inconsistencies in their attitudes about feminine roles and female personality traits and as a consequence changed attitudes to make them more congruent with one another. Women with few interactions with others received minimal feedback about their inconsistencies in attitudes, hence, the inconsistencies continued.

To summarize, these three studies dealt in general with incompatibilities or contradictions in roles available for college women, the impact of contradictions upon women students' attitudes toward roles and the relationships between sets of attitudes. While Wallin found contradictions in roles for women, he did not find that these contradictions posed a major problem

for college women. Kammeyer's focus was upon the attitudes women held toward role behavior and personality traits associated with the feminine role. He found that where attitude contradictions did exist such contradictions would be decreased by the degree to which a woman was integrated into the college social system as measured by the extent she interacted with others.

Our discussions with college women led us to expect that present day college women continued to experience some of the potential sources of strains and reinforcement patterns that previous investigators had found. In informal talks with women students, we learned that many "talked a good women's liberation orientation" but it was the kind that was "alright for others." From such discussions we began to suspect that on some campuses women have not changed drastically in their attitudes toward and definitions of the roles of women since the 1946 study. If differences have occurred in attitudes and definitions, we expected that the differences would be related to: (1) the student's year in college; (2) whether she was on a branch or the central campus of the university where the research was to be conducted; (3) whether she was working for a baccalaureate or PhD degree. We also assumed that women would be more likely to support behavior in other women which they would themselves be likely to exhibit in a similar situation.

Specifically, we hypothesized that freshmen women would be more secular in their orientation toward the woman's role, PhD students more secular than baccalaureate candidates and central campus more so than branch campus women. We chose to use the word "secular" rather than "modern" because we found it more descriptive for expressing a utilitarian and rational orientation, one connotating an acceptance of change and innovation.

We expected freshmen to be more secular than upperclasswomen for two reasons. First, the younger women had been exposed for a proportionately longer period of their lives to the newer feminist movement which began in the late 1960's. They would have, therefore, integrated more secular beliefs and attitudes into their personalities by the time they entered college. Second, as upperclasswomen approach and reach their senior year in college, the majority of those still in school and still unmarried experience anxiety about their single status, usually referred to as "senior panic." These women, therefore, would be expected to return to the more traditionally defined "feminine ways" in order to "catch a man."

We expected differences between PhD students and undergraduate students because of our assumption that the former have made a greater professional commitment than the latter and that this commitment in itself reflects a secular conception of the role of women.

Central campus women were expected to be more secular than branch campus women because the latter tend to live at home rather than in age-segregated dormitories or apartments and are thus more apt to comply with more conservative parental rather than peer pressure.

And, finally, we expected women who expressed approval of another woman's behavior to indicate that they themselves would behave in the same way as the object of their approval.

To test our hypotheses, we developed a questionnaire consisting of demographic questions, questions concerning plans following graduation and a series of stories based upon some of the situations described in the Komarovsky article and others students had described to us in informal discussions. Each story contained a built-in solution. All deal with some aspect of female/male relationships. One, for example, dealt with a young woman offered a more exciting and better paying job than her fiance and his reaction to this situation. Another involved a man's objections to his fiancee's involvement in a women's lib organization and her eventual withdrawal from the group. Copies of the eight stories reported on in this article can be obtained from the author. Half of the built-in solutions we defined as traditional ones, those in which the woman either complied with the request of a man important to her, "played dumb" in relation to a man, or chose a way of behaving which is characterized by what Kammeyer called

"female personality traits." In the remaining stories, the central character chose a situation which incorporated secular ways of behaving. The woman refused to be submissive or unaggressive, took the initiative in establishing a relationship with a man, chose career over marriage when faced with an either/or choice or followed a single standard of sexual morality.

We asked students whether or not they approved of the solutions presented hoping in this way to learn whether women chose more traditional solutions or those solutions which in the original study were referred to as "modern" role behavior. In addition, we also asked each respondent to indicate whether she would act in the manner described in the story in an attempt to learn whether congruence existed between behavior approved for others and behavior defined as appropriate for oneself. If respondents routinely approved of behavior in others that they would not engage in themselves, then this might indicate that they were not using a general expectation of appropriate feminine behavior--but that in typical relativistic "do-your-own-thingism" fashion they were unwilling to impose their own values as an evaluative standard to measure the behavior of others.

Student's responses to the inquiry about their approval or disapproval to the story solutions were scored 4 for approval of the secular solution

and 1 for the traditional solution. An overall mean score was computed for each respondent based upon the actual number of stories she responded to. A total mean score of 1.00 to 2.49 was defined as representing a traditional orientation to the role of women. Scores ranging from 2.50 to 3.49 were classified as normative orientation scores while a score of 3.50 to 4.00 indicated a secular orientation.

We sent this questionnaire to a 10 percent randomly selected sample of single women in each class on the central campus of the university and to 20 percent of each class on each of the two branch campuses. We increased the percentage of the sample on the branch campuses because of the small class sizes on these campuses. We hoped that by using a larger sample we would, in this instance, have a more representative one and run less danger of getting spurious results.

A single follow-up letter was sent to nonrespondents. Out of a total of 555 questionnaires sent out on the central campus, 357 (64.3 percent) usable ones were returned. There was a much smaller percentage of returns from the branch campuses. A total of 309 questionnaires were sent to both campuses and 108 or 35 percent were returned. The small return from the branch campuses was expected because of our belief that students on branch campuses are less influenced by and integrated into the central campus culture(s). One aspect of central campus culture is student ex-

pectation that somewhere along one's college career he or she will be sent a questionnaire by an inquisitive faculty researcher or will be asked to participate in some other kind of research project.

Our findings are thus based upon 466 returned questionnaires. Our total sample consisted of 31.6 percent freshmen, 28 percent sophomores, 19.8 percent juniors and 15.5 percent seniors. In addition, 21 of 25 PhD students responded. The largest number of respondents was from the College of Arts and Science (46.3 percent) and the second largest from the School of Education (35.5 percent). The sample was overwhelmingly white, predominantly Protestant, self-identified as middle and upper middle class. When asked whether marriage were a primary goal in life, 55 percent responded affirmatively. A minority of 26 percent took the more secular position that marriage is not a primary goal and 19.1 percent could not decide either way.

In response to the question of whether marriage was viewed as both desirable and necessary for a complete and well-rounded life, 37.2 percent responded yes while 59.6 percent viewed it as desirable but unnecessary. The balance of the respondents either found marriage undesirable but necessary (.4 percent) or both undesirable and unnecessary (2.8 percent). When the question was asked whether children were desirable and necessary for a complete and well-rounded life, 28.9 percent indicated they are, while 63.6 percent viewed children as desirable but unnecessary. The other respondents found children undesirable but necessary (.7 percent) and both undesirable and unnecessary (6.9 percent). One wonders about the effects of Zero Population Growth on college campuses.

Using role orientation scores as a means of measuring the accuracy of our original predictions, we compared overall role-orientation scores of freshmen with those of upperclasswomen excluding PhD students. We used the X^2 statistic to test for statistical significance. The X^2 score was 5.62 and was not significant. (This table as well as other ones cited in this paper are available from the author.)

The data showed that proportionately slightly more upperclass vomen were traditional in orientation than freshmen but, more strikingly, proportionately more upperclasswomen than freshmen were secular in orientation. In short and contrary to our expectations, upperclasswomen predominate at both ends of the role orientation continuum. There are several explanations which could account for this finding. Freshmen women were indeed proportionately less tradition oriented, as we had expected. At the same time, the difference was a slight one in comparison with upperclasswomen. Our initial supposition that women's role conceptions including those of entering freshmen women had not changed drastically since the end of the Second World War was perhaps being borne out by this finding about the entering freshmen students. At the same time, in order to explain this difference in scores, although it was not a statistically significant one, we considered several other alternative possibilities. First, it is likely that the entering freshmen, reflecting their earlier socialization, tend for the most part to be "middle of

the road" in their approaches to a variety of th. "s including role conceptions. It is, indeed, this "middle of the road" or normative orientation that serves to integrate the vast majority of people into the social system. It is in college, as a result of exposure to the more secular orientation of their reading and to some professors that they become more secular in their viewpoint. Moreover, exposure to the more liberated viewpoint of upperclass students results in this movement away from the normative toward the secular.

Another explanation has to do with the changing sexual pattern among women on this particular campus. Sherwin (unpublished material) had found that women students on this same central campus were involved in quantitatively more and qualitatively varied sexual activities than they had been ten years ago. In order to bring their attitudes in line with changed behavior (or more precisely, in an effort to reduce potential cognitive dissonance or to increase cognitive consistency), women become more secular in their orientation toward the role of women. In a general sense, these explanations could be consistent with the communications model explanation which Kammeyer proposed in his article. Interaction with others calls attention to attitude inconsistencies and hence the individual changes her attitudes so that they become more consistent with one another. Still another explanation has to do with the fact that those women remaining in

college after the first two years tend perhaps to be more occupationally oriented and hence more secular than entering students. The more traditionally oriented and normative oriented women would be expected to leave school before completing their degree work for the more traditional role activities of wife and mother, leaving behind the more secular oriented women.

When we examined our data to find out whether branch campus or central campus women were more secular, we learned not unexpectedly that central campus women were significantly more secular and less tradition oriented than branch campus women as measured with the X^2 statistic. The X^2 was 9.76 with a p level greater than .01.

Our third point was examined, whether PhD students were more secular than students working for the undergraduate degree. We were somewhat limited in analyzing these data because of the small number of women PhD students registered at the time our sample was selected--25. As noted earlier, 21 of these 25 did respond to our questionnaire but in reading over their responses it was obvious that this was an amazingly hetergeneous sample, and the pooling of the statistical data masks this heterogeneity. With this caveat in mind, we can report that we did find some differences. PhD candidates are more secular in role orientation than are undergraduates; proportionately fewer are normative in orienta-

tion than the undergradutes; but, interestingly enough, relatively similar proportion of both undergraduates and of PhD students were found to be traditional in their orientation. To test for statistical significance, we again used the X^2 statistic. But because of the extremely small PhD sample, we collapsed the traditional and normative oriented categories into one category to perform the statistical analysis. We used Yule's Q to test for the degree of association and found, as we expected, that the PhD students are more secular in orientation than undergraduates. The strength of the association as measured by Yule's Q, however, was only .55.

Our final point was somewhat more complicated to test. As we observed earlier, we were interested in the relationship between women's attitudes toward the behavior of other women and what they (the respondents) said they would do under the same circumstances. To test this, we examinied responses students gave to each of the situation stories, whether or not they approved of the stories' solutions and whether or not they would do the same thing under the same circumstances. When mean role orientation scores were computed for the entire sample, 8.8 percent was tradition oriented, 53 percent was normative oriented while 37.6 percent was secular oriented. When, however, respondents were asked about their own behavior in the same situations, the scores changed: 17 percent was tradition oriented,

60.5 percent was normative oriented and only 21.9 percent was secular oriented. These differences are significant beyond the .001 level indicating that there are marked differences between one's attitude toward the behavior of others and one's attitudes toward one's own behavior under the same circumstances. This was particularly true for those with traditional orientation who are more traditional in their orientations toward their own behavior than toward the behavior of others and for those with a secular orientation who were less secular about their own behavior than about the behavior of others. Those with a normative orientation show congruence between attitudes toward others' behavior and toward one's anticipated behavior in the same circumstances.

In analyzing responses to the individual stories, we found the responses to one story particularly interesting. It dealt with a woman asking a man for a date. The story itself is very brief:

Carol is attracted to Dick whom she just recently met. It is Saturday night and she has nothing to do although there is a movie she would like to see. She calls Dick to ask him to go to the movie with her.

This story described a relatively simple situation, one in which we would expect women to do as Carol did if we are to believ much of what is written about the more liberated women, yet more than half of the respondent's (56.0 percent) expressed disapproval of Carol's behavior. Even

when a more secular stand is taken and Carol's behavior is approved, the majority of those women approving of Carol's behavior (61.4 percent) indicated that they would not do what she did--they would not call a man to ask him to go out with her. In this case, the traditional role behavior is still the dominant one both with respect to what is approved or disapproved and what one would do herself. Respondents, in making comments about this story, said among other things: Carol is "being very forward" in asking Dick for a date. Another, saying she would not do the same thing, commented, "Hang ups, I guess." This same woman in her other comments said, "Women's Lib is stupid as it exists now. I am not a campaigner and I've seen too many of my friends turn into real hard asses by this idea. I think I'm a 'liberated' woman because I do what I feel the need and desire to do but try to be tolerant of my fiance's ideas as well. Give and take still lives!" Still a third commented: "In my mind it is a matter of pride. I couldn't call a guy up and ask him to a movie unless he were an old friend."

This story evoked perhaps the most inconsistent responses from students. Many who gave secular responses to other stories gave the traditional one to this story. It is almost as though the other stories could be discussed abstractly, had no existential referent, but this story got down to the "nitty gritty" daily experiences of campus life. It was here, then,

that the situation was most real and, therefore, called forth the most commonly accepted cultural definition and solution.

If we consider expressed approval or disapproval of another's behavior as evidence of one's attitude toward that behavior, then we found normatively oriented women to show the most congruence between their attitudes toward the behavior of another and what one says she would do under the same circumstances. It should be stressed, however, that these are pooled data and that analysis of specific stories might show a greater degree of congruence between attitudes toward other's behavior and one's anticipated behavior under the same conditions.

Although college women of today appear to be more secular than women of the past in orientation toward role definitions for women, still, in the very simplest kind of situation, that of asking a man to spend an evening with her at a movie, women at least on this campus, tend to be quite traditional in definitions of appropriate sex role behavior. As already noted, it may be that the very simplicity of that particular story made the answers unambiguous and uninfluenced by other factors. Other stories contained what could well be considered contaminating factors which might influence approval or disapproval: whether or not the couple involved were married, whether there were children, whether they "really loved each other." A sampling of students' written comments on the re-

turned questionnaires highlighted the complexity of developing a series of simple unambiguous situation stories. The written remarks often made it obvious that they were responding to a variety of factors other than what constituted appropriate sex role behavior. For example, many students objected to "playing dumb" in relation to a man because it is dishonest rather than because they have redefined what is appropriate sex role behavior. Written remarks often provided evidence for the existence of autonomous rather than heteronomous relations to sex-role norms (Bredemeier and Stephenson, 1962). In other words, students seemed guided more by a situation ethic than by any monalithic conception of appropriate role behavior. Role expectation rarely appeared to be an either/or matter but more a matter of "it-depends-on-the-situation." We found, as did Cuber (1972),that respondents were guided by a "higher ethic" than role definitions of appropriate behavior. "If you are married you should work things out." "One should be honest in relationships with others." On other occasions, practical and pragmatic considerations rather than absolute moral principles guided decisions about behavior. "Don't lie about your ability, you'll be found out eventually" or "He's going to find out sooner or later anyhow."

Summary

On the basis of what we found in a small but representative sample

from a single midwestern university, there appear to be more than two roles--traditional and secular--available for college women. Indeed, there is a diversity of roles, and role behavior and expectations seem more influenced by situational determinants than by a generalized role conception appropriate under all circumstances. We suspect that not only are there more options available in defining roles and role behavior, but that more of the alternatives are defined as appropriate and acceptable. The availability of alternative patterns of role behavior, rather than producing conflict may serve ultimately to reduce conflict.

When conflict was measured by the lack of congruence between attitude toward another's behavior and one's anticipated behavior in the same situation, we found greater consistency among those exhibiting a normative role orientation in contrast with those at either end of the traditional-secular orientation continuum. The traditional-toward-others become even more traditional with reference to their own behavior while the secular-toward-others are less secular with reference to their own behavior. The latter permit others greater role latitude than they permit themselves.

Our data also indicated a difference in orientation toward the role of women as one moves through one's college career, moving from a traditional and normative orientation toward a secular one. The majority of

women, however, are "middle-of-the-road" in orientation toward the role of women--in fact, this is one of the definitions of normative behavior. It does appear to us that the increase in those with a secular orientation may result from the socialization experiences these women encounter in college. While the "senior panic" may pose a real threat to some women, for many other women a commitment toward a profession or occupation does develop in school. There is evidence in the literature about the socializing aspects of professional training and we see no reason to doubt the possible existence and impact of socialization in the preprofessional and baccalaureate training programs. Such a socialization experience does contribute toward a more secular orientation toward the role of women. Of course, our study is a cross sectional one and a longitudinal study would be more appropriate for testing the accuracy of these interpretations.

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Footnotes

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